

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 ACDA-12 HA-05
EUR-12 INT-05 IO-13 OES-07 /140 W
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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1829
INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY SUVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 8221

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS

SUBJECT: THE AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS: FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE

1. SUMMARY: FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY A DECADE, NEITHER FOREIGN AFFAIRS GENERALLY, NOR AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US IN PARTICULAR, IS A PROMINENT ISSUE IN AN AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ELECTION. THE LABOR PARTY LEFT-WING SEEMS MUTED, ALMOST AS THOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO REALIZE THAT THERE ARE NO VOTES TO BE HAD THIS TIME BY BAITING THE AMERICANS. THE LIBERAL/NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY COALITION, ALTHOUGH NOT TO SHY TO BRAG ABOUT HAVING "RESTORED" GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., ACCEPTS THAT THIS ELECTION IS TO BE FOUGHT PRIMARILY OVER THE STATE OF THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY, AND NOT OVER FLAG-WAVING JINGOISM. BOTH MAJOR PARTIES HAVE PLEDGED TO STRENGTHEN AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE, BUT ARE SUITABLY FUZZY ABOUT HOW, AND AT WHAT COST. END SUMMARY.

2. WHITLAM, SIGNIFICANTLY, IN DELIVERING THE ALP POLICY (KEYNOTE) ADDRESS, DID NOT DEVOTE SO MUCH AS A PARAGRAPH
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TO EITHER FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEFENSE ISSUES. HIS MILD (FOR HIM) STATEMENTS ON URANIUM WERE COUCHED GENERALLY AND ALONG NON-INFLAMMATORY LINES: "THE PLAIN FACT IS THAT THERE IS NO NEED FOR AUSTRALIA TO TAKE ANY IRREVOLCBLE DECISIONS WHICH WOULD LOCK AUSTRALIA INTO THE PLUTONIUM ECONOMY...NO NEED TO MAKE A FINAL DECISION BEFORE THERE ARE SAFE METHODS OF DISPOSING NUCLEAR WASTE -- NO NEED

TO MAKE A FINAL DECISION BEFORE THERE ARE ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THE SPREAD OF WEAPONS FOR NUCLEAR WAR." HE PLEDGED THAT A LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD "ADOPT AN EXPORT-ORIENTED STRATEGY FOR THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY" WITHOUT ONCE MENTIONING ASEAN. AND HE REAFFIRMED HIS PRIDE THAT THE ILL-FATED 1972-75 LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD GIVEN AUSTRALIA "A NEW STANDING AND INDEPENDENCE AMONG NATIONS." THE ALP HAS THUS FAR NOT CHOSEN TO RESPOND TO FRASER'S BOLD AND OPEN BOAST THAT IT HAD RENEWED THE PINE GAP AGREEMENT WITH THE US FOR A FURTHER TEN YEARS. ABOUT THE ONLY DIRECT CHALLENGE THE ALP HAS ISSUED THE GOVERNMENT IN THE FOREIGN RELATIONS SPHERE WAS YESTERDAY'S STATEMENT BY SENATOR MULVIHILL (LABOR SPOKESMAN ON IMMIGRATION) THAT A LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD BEGIN TURNING THE "BOAT CASES" BACK WHENCE THEY CAME. MULVIHILL'S STATEMENT IMMEDIATELY DREW STRONG CRITICISM, BUT IT MAY STRIKE A RESPONSIVE (IF RETORGRADE) CHORD AMONG AUSTRALIANS ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THEIR OWN HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, AND UNEASY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE TRICKLE OF ASIAN REFUGEES COULD BECOME A FLOOD. IT HAS REMAINED FOR WHITLAM AND OTHER SENIOR ALP CAMPAIGNERS TO RESPOND TO PRIME MINISTER FRASER'S STATEMENTS ON DEFENSE BY ECHOING THAT THEY TOO WOULD NOT LET AUSTRALIA SUFFER FROM NEGLECT OF DEFENSE.

3. PRIME MINISTER FRASER, IN HIS LIBERAL PARTY POLICY SPEECH, WAS LESS RETICENT ABOUT HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVE-CONFIDENTIAL

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MENTS: "WE HAVE RESTORED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES...OUR LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN ARE IN A HEALTHY STATE. THE ANZUS TREATY CONTINUES TO BE OUR BASIC PERMANENT TREATY OF MUTUAL SECURITY WITH THE UNITED STATES IN THE PACIFIC REGION. IN THE SOUTHEASE ASIAN REGION, WE HAVE ESTABLISHED A MORE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ASEAN; WE ARE BUILDING CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONS WITH INDOCHINA AND WE ARE GIVING HUMANITARIAN AID. WE ARE FRIENDLY AND CLOSE TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND WE ARE SHARING COMMON INTERESTS WITH THE SOUTH PACIFIC COUNTRIES. THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE ITS OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID IN SOUGH AFRICA, AND IT STRONGLY SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IN THE MEDDLE EAST." IN DEFENSE MATTERS, FRASER PLEDGED TO INCREASE SPENDING BY ONE PERCENT OVER THE CURRENT BUDGET, PROMISED TO INITIATE CONSTRUCTION OF 14 FAST PATROL BOATS IN QUEENSLAND, - ,32 NAVY CARGO SHIP AT NEWCASTLE, AND SAID THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ORDER A THIRD GUIDED-MISSILE FRIGATE (THE FIRST TWO ARE BEING BUILT IN THE U.S.). FRASER SAID PLANS FOR A NEW TACTICAL FIGHTER TO REPLACE THE RAAF'S AGING MIRAGES WOULD PROCEED, BUT ADMITTED THAT SELCTION OF THE REPLACEMENT WAS NOT

IMMINENT.

4. ABOUT THE ONLY MAJOR UNKNOWN FACTOR IN THE EQUATION IS WHO LABOR'S PRINCIPAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN MIGHT BE. WHITLAM, IN A MOVE THAT CLEARLY CAUGHT HIS OWN PARTY BY SURPRISE (AND UNWILLING TO ACQUIESCE), ANNOUNCED JUST AFTER THE OPENING OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT BILL HAYDEN WOULD ASSUME THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO. WITHIN DAYS, HE WAS FORCED TO RECAT IN THE FACE OF WIDESPREAD DEMANDS THAT HAYDEN CONTINUE AS THE MAIN FIGURE ON LABOR'S ECONOMIC TEAM. ANOTHER YOUNG RISING ALP STAR WHOSE NAME HAS BEEN MENTIONED FOR THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS POST IS MICH YOUNG, CURRENTLY IN THE "INDUSTRIES" AREA. HAYDEN IS SOBER, QUIET, INDUSTRIS, THOUGHTFUL, AND A GOOD FRIEND
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OF THE UNITED STATES. YOUNG IS MORE YOUTHFUL, A BIT BRASH, HAS RISEN THROUGH TRADE UNION RANKS, BUT HAS SHOWN HIMSELF RECENTLY TO BE A THOUGHTFUL ADVOCATE OF A LESS-MYOPIC AUSTRALIA THAN OTHERS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES. IN ANY EVENT, IT IS WIDELY (AND PROBABLY SAFELY) ASSUMED THAT THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF AN ALP FOREIGN POLICY WOULD BE GUIDED BY SHITLAM HIMSELF. WITH THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ASPECTS OF THE ALP 1972-75 FOREIGN POLICY NOW OBSOLETE (MILITARY CONSCRIPTION, RECOGNITION OF CHINA, ENDING THE VIETNAM WAR, "FOREGIN BASES" NOT AN ISSUE IN THIS CAMPAIGN), THE MAJOR IRRITANTS IN THE EARLIER ALP FOREING POLICY ARE NO LONGER WITH US. WHAT REMAINS ARE QUESTION MARKS -- AND GIVEN THE FOCUS IN THIS CAMPAIGN ON ECONOMIC ISSUES, THOSES QUESTION ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE RESOLVED BEFORE DECEMBER 10TH.
ALSTON

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